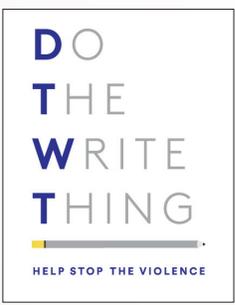




Do the Write Thing

Canton

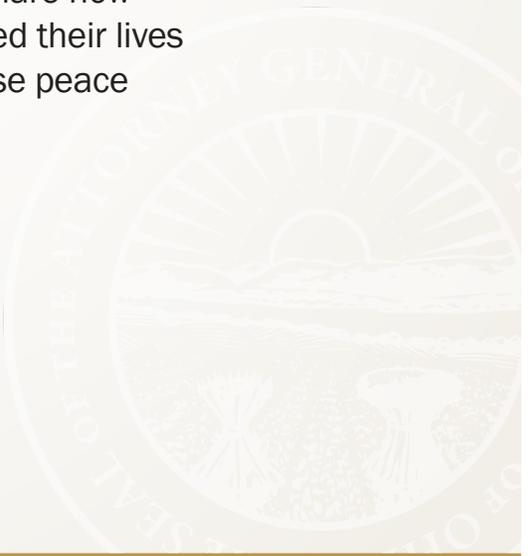


2023

Canton City School District
 middle-schoolers share how
 violence has touched their lives
 and how they choose peace



DAVE YOST
 OHIO ATTORNEY GENERAL



FROM THE ATTORNEY GENERAL

As Ohio's Attorney General, I am so pleased to have partnered with the Canton City School District in the *Do the Write Thing* program for the second year in a row. A total of five Ohio school districts have now participated in the program, and it continues to grow across the state.

The students of Canton once again amazed me with their honesty, compassion and critical insight into the violence of their time. These essays most certainly were not easy to write, and often tough to read, but the impact of their words is invaluable to our search for understanding and a more peaceful society.

Do the Write Thing provides students the opportunity to speak their own minds and share their thoughts about how to address the violence they have experienced or witnessed. There is true treasure in these writings.

I commend these young people for the courage it took to share their thoughts and ideas, and I hope they continue to look for opportunities to improve their school and community.

I encourage everyone to take time to read the essays in this book. You may be surprised by what you learn, but I know it will leave you proud and optimistic about the generations to come.



Yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Dave Yost". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

DAVE YOST
Ohio Attorney General

FROM THE SUPERINTENDENT

For the second year, I am proud to say that the Canton City School District had over 500 middle school students accept the *Do the Write Thing* Challenge. With their Language Arts teachers and classmates, they had the opportunity to have group discussions about how youth violence affects them, and then write a personal essay about how violence impacts their daily lives. As part of this contest, students were asked to explore the causes of youth violence in our city and what they can do to reduce it.

In Ohio, the national program is sponsored by Attorney General Dave Yost and his staff and I am so thankful he offered this opportunity and creative outlet to our students. By sharing their experiences and ideas in their own voices, they can help encourage others to address challenges and resolve problems without conflict and violence.

I want to thank our students for sharing their honest and raw stories and poems. Writing is a positive outlet to work through feelings and thoughts about personal experiences. Our students are already making an impact by expressing themselves and sharing their passion and courage through their written work.

Thanks also to the teachers and staff who guided the students as they put their thoughts in writing. They too deserve our gratitude for supporting and empathizing with students who bravely share their thoughts and experiences about violence in their lives and in our community.

Congratulations to our finalists and to our two winners. I look forward to the two ambassadors representing us in Washington, D.C., and learning more about other perspectives on the causes and effects of violence and how we all can work to reduce it in our community.

Sincerely,

JEFF TALBERT

Superintendent

Canton City School District



ABOUT THE PROGRAM

This book contains a compilation of writings by middle-school students who were selected as the top 18 finalists of the 2023 *Do the Write Thing* program. This book will be shared across the community in recognition of all the students who accepted the challenge to share their voices and help create a safer, more peaceful society.

Overview of Do the Write Thing

Do the Write Thing is a unique national program designed to give middle-school students an outlet to communicate in classroom discussions and then in writing how violence impacts their daily lives. In addition to exposing the causes and effects of violence, students are asked to share their ideas on reducing violence in their community.

The program asks students to express in stories, poems and songs, or in any other written forms, the violence they've faced, with an emphasis on exploring these key questions:

- How does violence affect your daily life?
- What are some of the causes of youth violence in your community?
- What can you as an individual do to reduce youth violence in your community?

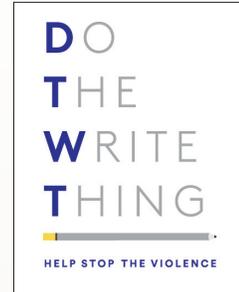
The benefits of the challenge are many. Students gain a greater empathy and understanding for victims of violence and realize that their positive actions can make a difference in their own home, schools and neighborhoods. Teachers gain a better awareness of what is happening in their students' lives and in the school culture. Community leaders benefit from greater understanding of the impact that violence has on youth and learn from the students' stories and ideas for reducing violence.

Do the Write Thing in Canton

During the 2022-23 school year, Ohio Attorney General Dave Yost partnered with the Canton City School District for the *Do the Write Thing* program. The program was well received, with more than 500 seventh- and eighth-grade students submitting essays.

Canton community and business leaders volunteered their time to read each essay and choose the 18 submissions most responsive to the key questions. From the top 18, two students were selected to become Ohio ambassadors to the national *Do the Write Thing* conference in Washington, D.C.

A special thank you to all of the community volunteers, teachers, principals and school administrators who helped make *Do the Write Thing* such a great success in Canton.



Do the Write Thing is the flagship program of the National Campaign to Stop Violence and has been in existence for 28 years. It operates programs in 28 cities in 14 states. Over the past 28 years, more than 1.5 million middle school students have participated in the program.

The national sponsor for the Do the Write Thing program is the Kuwait America Foundation.



ESSAY 1 | AMBASSADOR

TYLER ALFÁS

Early College Middle School

How is it that we can send a telescope through space to study the Big Bang, formation of solar systems, and even other habitable planets for us to colonize when we can't seem to fix one of the biggest issues plaguing youths on our home planet? Violence surrounds everyone, regardless of race, ethnicity, age, gender, sexuality, and several other characteristics. Regardless, one of the most important areas of youth violence is using firearms usually for suicide or school shootings. Firearms recently became the number one cause of death in children, with a staggering 6000 youths being injured or killed via firearms just in 2022 (Hauk). Gun violence stems from many other forms of youth violence and as youths are put under stress from them, some eventually snap; killing both themselves and others.

First, some of the most common yet deadly acts of gun violence among youths stem from other acts of violence. A study conducted by Alfred University found that some of the top reasons for school shootings were bullying, substance abuse, and access to a gun (Gaughan). Additionally, these were the top reasons for suicide among youths. Interestingly, firearms cause almost ninety percent of youth suicides (McGough). It seems as if the causes of the most deadly form of youth violence are both mental health issues and access to a gun. It makes sense when you think about it from the perspective of a youth. Bullying and substances will wear down your mental health, you are unhappy and anything else is better. What better way to both get revenge and end your suffering than killing the bullying, yourself or even both? A knife however, does not guarantee death and using it for suicide can be painful. That's where violence via firearms comes in. You can make sure you successfully have a quick and painless death or make sure your bully actually dies.

I believe these acts of violence have negatively impacted millions if not billions globally, including me in a variety of ways. I have simply heard or read about school shootings such as the elementary school in Uvalde, Texas, and the news filled millions with grief, including me. Gun violence truly becomes an issue when children die when simply getting an education. Every day, I text, "I love you" to my mom and dad, knowing either of them could wake up and anyone including me could get shot at school. While there

is the off chance that we do experience such a tragedy, we still have to do lockdown drills that take time out of our education and remind us of the threat of death. Why can't children and youths simply get an education without the threat of death and violence constantly hanging over their head?

Since gun violence is the most common form of youth violence, it would make sense to simply hide guns from youths. This is not the case, however, as there are multiple factors that may result in youth violence. We can definitely prevent some shootings or suicide shootings if we remove firearms, it would be slower, painful, and not guaranteed death if youths committed suicide with weapons like knives. Yet this only solves a small fraction of the violence occurring. If we were to go to the root of gun violence and simply youth violence in general, we could prevent almost all youth violence. Mental health is incredibly complex, yet powerful in many aspects of life. One small spark of kindness can temporarily fix a raging fire of bullying, depression, abuse... If we could teach children early on in life to prioritize mental health and kindness, we could effectively prevent most effects of youth violence before they are even exposed to it. For example, imagine you are at school and something seems to be upsetting another student. Your parents told you to be kind to others, especially when they seem to be struggling or upset. This seems like the perfect chance to do that. "Hey!", you say while walking up to them. "How's your day?". "Fine," they say. "Is that a Harry Potter book?!" You exclaimed, "Yeah, why?". "I love Harry Potter books but no one else seemed to like them here. Wanna hang out later?". "Please, I mean yeah, sure, what time?" You two plan to hang out and become lifelong friends.

While this may have been a perfectly normal situation to the youth educated on violence early on, the other person's mind was a storm of emotions. "Screw this. I'm ending it tonight. . . Or tomorrow. . . Or soon." A stranger walks up to you, "Did I say it out loud?!" Panic ensues until, "Is that a Harry Potter book?!" Your thoughts slightly drift away from the violence. While you still want to end it, you're unconsciously looking for any spark of hope or kindness. You plead, no, agree to hang out. "You know what, not



everyone is that bad.” You eventually tell your new friends what has been happening and you already feel better. After talking with the guidance counselor and lots of support, you feel truly happy after years of torture. It’s a weird experience, but you definitely prefer this.

Violence is a term that encapsulates many ideas and emotions. While it can vary in types and causes, the impact it has is truly devastating to everyone. Youth violence, both threatens and causes death or injury to millions worldwide, especially regarding firearms. We could prevent so much loss of life and suffering by using the power of the human mind, mental health, and kindness. By educating children early in prioritizing mental health and being kind to others while avoiding acts of violence, children are effectively taught how to deal with youth violence usually before they encounter it in their adolescence. Youth violence is an everyday tragedy, yet it is truly inspiring how just a few words and some education could prevent someone from aiming that gun at someone’s head, or their own.

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ESSAY 2

ALEX ALLISON

Early College Middle School

Youth violence, most people hear about in many ways like through the news, school, ect. I want to talk about LGBTQIA+ teens, the second leading cause of death is suicide, but LGBTQIA+ teens are four more times likely to consider it. Ages 13-24 have suicide attempts every 45 seconds in the U.S. 19% of LGBTQIA+ teens ages 13-18 are reported of killing themselves. A total of 503,073 attempted to kill themselves in 2021. In total 712,990 teens from the ages 13-24 have killed themselves in 2021. All of this information is from my favorite source The Trevor Project. I personally as an LGBTQIA+ teen have thought about killing myself, but never actually attempted.

Most people think that LGBTQIA+ teens kill themselves for being gay. Many times I thought of ending it were mostly because of being bullied, thinking no one will love me for who I am and lots of other reasons. When I was in the darkest moments of my life about not accepting myself for who I am I found this community of other people like me or have been in the same situation as me. This community is called the Trevor Project, it's to help LGBTQIA+ youth and adults. You don't have to be part of the LGBTQIA+ to join, you can be an ally. This community has helped me through hard times. But less of that, the main reason why LGBTQIA+ teens kill themselves is because of being bullied, low self-esteem, substance abuse, discrimination, gender nonconformity, ect.

Let's talk more about the Trevor Project and what it does for the LGBTQIA+ community. Well first it provides counseling for those who need to talk to someone. It also provides lots of information about LGBTQIA+ youth suicide. It has spaces full of people and you can join them. I personally am a part of the transgender ones and just the random groups people have for more fun. There's a lot you can do! People are willing to help you and if you're willing to help others it's a lot of fun and comfortable for people who don't know who they are, or that just want to talk to people that are more like them. People are very nice in the Trevor Project. I know this one YouTuber who is doing a fundraiser for them. He has a lot of content about the LGBTQIA+ community and it's really funny. His YouTube is One Topic At A Time.

Let's talk more and get to know a bit more about me. I am 13, in 8th grade, and a part of the LGBTQIA+ community. My dead name is Lilly, my preferred name is Alexander (Alex for short), I go by He/They pronouns. I'm also transgender and asexual, and

neptunic. I'm 5'3 and have blue-gray eyes, I have to wear glasses. I was born June 25 in 2009. I have a girlfriend, for private reasons, I will not be saying their name. They identify as gender fluid and neptunic, the attraction to everyone but cis males (simple definition). I've never been diagnosed with anything that affects my mental health. I have an older brother who is 15. He's bisexual and goes by him/his/he. I like watching YouTube and TikTok. I get good grades and try my hardest in school. This is all that I would like to share with you about myself. I don't want to get too personal because it's just not my thing to share a lot about myself. I want to just say that this topic is a really good topic that most people don't know about or just don't like to talk about. I've read a lot of things that say that LGBTQIA+ teens and youth aren't really the ones who attempt to kill themselves. Yes, I know that other people who aren't in the LGBTQIA+ community have killed themselves but it's harder for teens that are a part of this community because of homophobes or their parents.

On the other hand, ways to help youth violence go down you can think about what people are going through. I'm going to give you a few questions to think about, as if you were a bully. Not saying you are, but just pretend, so you know that kid you said was a fag? That kid's parents are homophobic, that kid can't come out to them or they get kicked out. How about that kid you said should kill? That kid has actually thought about it and self-harms. How about the kid you said was fat? They haven't eaten anything for days, only chewing gum and drinking water. What about that kid you said was the "quiet kid" and might shoot up the school? That kid doesn't like to talk to people or that kid has social anxiety. You know that kid you said wears too much makeup? What do you think happens at home? That kid gets hit or abused and hides it. Just think, what if that was you, would you feel bad for yourself? If you said no, that's just wrong. If you said yes, thank you for being a good person. Well you're probably thinking what if I don't bully people what difference can I make? Well you can make a big difference by sitting with the new kids, helping others when they are getting bullied, listening to others, telling a trusted adult about someone you're worried about. What if you're the person that is being bullied, wants to die, ect? Well tell your friends your worries or tell a trusted adult. Try to get help even if you don't think you're worth worrying about. Plus you may think your teachers don't care, but most likely they do but don't show it. If they don't, that's a bad teacher. Trust me at least one person will care if you kill yourself.



ESSAY 3

ALEC BENNETT

Crenshaw Middle School



Violence has affected most of America. Violence happens at people's homes, at school, and their neighborhood and we have to stop it. It makes me feel so bad inside for all the people who have experienced violence. Unfortunately, violence has affected my life quite a bit. I now live in Canton, but I used to live in Kent, and I was bullied. I was also called rude and offensive names a lot. I was made fun of for talking to my dad and the YouTube videos I had watched. They would also make fun of the things I would wear and make fun of my appearances. They made fun of my weight, my height, and my laugh. I was also bullied online by the same people. Now me personally, I think the reason why people bully others is because something is going on with them like causes of violence to themselves. That's exactly why we need to reduce violence.

There are many causes of violence, like being bullied. Being bullied is one of the worst ones because I've experienced it and it creates sadness and anger. That anger can lead to more violence, which is why we need to hit the brakes on it. Parents not being there for their children and adults not properly locking up weapons. Not properly locking up weapons could lead to a lot of violence like a school shooting/attack like just recently. So let's take a moment to say that just recently, there was gun violence that had happened at the University of Virginia, which is horrible. The three young football players that passed away were too young, and they didn't deserve to die. I hope that the 2 other people that were injured in the attack can and

will recover well. A person's mental health can also end up in violence. Abusive parents or fighting are also causes. Fighting with someone or a sibling or a parent can lead to other people possibly joining in, creating more violence. Threats with weapons or threats in general are more examples. Gang-related violence or previous experiences of violence are big ones. Harsh discipline, and social rejection are good examples too because if someone is socially rejected, they could lead to sadness which could end up with hurting themselves and could involve parents. Youth violence happens everyday so that's why we need to stop it.

There are many ways to reduce violence in communities. We all have a role to play in preventing youth violence. All we have to do is be more kind to our community, and not ignore any of the warning signs or participate in violence either. So always remember if you see something, say something using the Say Something app. A commitment to school can reduce violence because I think good grades can give a good attitude in my opinion. Me personally, I had bad grades from going online because of the Coronavirus. So when I moved here and got four A's on my report card, and I had excitement flowing through my body. We can also rely on each other and create more relationships with each other and trusted adults that you feel comfortable around. There are plenty of ways to reduce violence. Violence is affecting us more than you think. And that's why we need to stop it.



ESSAY 4

STORI BOONE

Crenshaw Middle School

Has violence affected your life? For me, violence affected me because my dad abused my mom. This started while my mom was pregnant with me and until he left.

There are many stories I could tell you about the things my dad did to my mom. So I'm going to tell you the story I remember the most. So one night after kicking my dad out, me, my mom and little brother were sleeping upstairs in my brothers room. My dad managed to break in quietly enough to not wake us up. I remember hearing my mom scream as me and my brother woke up to my dad dragging her out of bed by her hair. He started dragging her down the stairs and towards her bedroom. My mom tried to get out of his grasp but he got her to the bedroom and pinned her in the corner. Me and my little brother screamed and cried for him to let her go but he was too busy yelling and holding her down to listen to us. He took his hand and covered her nose and mouth making her lose her breath. I heard the muffled screams of my mom as me and my little brother slapped, punched, bit, and pounded on his bare back. We tried to do everything we could to get him off of her but it just wouldn't work. My mom finally kicked him hard enough for him to fall back. She got up and ran and yelled at us to follow behind her. She grabbed the keys to our truck. We went outside to find the windshield of our truck shattered. We then ran to the laundry mat that was next to our house and hid in there as we called the police. By the time the cops came, he was already gone. I could tell you so many more stories about the things I witnessed at a young age and how those things affected me. Some of these effects are bad and some are good. One bad thing that I developed is really bad anxiety. I hate being around loud or too many people. One good thing I developed from this is I know to never let anyone take advantage of or hurt me in the way my dad did to my mom because I

know I deserve to be treated better than that. I also learned how to be independent and take care of myself because not everyone is going to help you.

One of the causes of youth violence is when children experience violence with their families within their home. As someone who has also experienced this, I know how it can affect someone. Growing up in a violent home is very traumatic for a child. These traumatic things can lead the people affected by it to become aggressive and even continue the cycle of what they have been through like the saying, "The abused becomes the abuser". It could also affect them in a way that makes them have social and emotional issues, poor judgment in who they involve themselves with, substance abuse and high sexual tendencies leading to teen pregnancies. They could give up in school and even become criminals. Lack of self-esteem and being full of anger, are things that occur a lot. Children and teens mostly developed anxiety, depression and acts of aggression towards others. There are many things that lead to youth violence, but those are the most common. The article I got this information from states that "When a parent terrorizes another parent, their children are terrorized too! Anger is deeply set within those children. Anger that is so deep and long lasting that when that child reaches adulthood, the damage is already done." This tells us that the damage from youth violence can be life lasting. Since I experienced youth violence at such a young age, I need to pay attention to my actions and not let my anger out on others. Sometimes it is hard to deal with the social and emotional issues that I developed from the things I went through. I'm learning and working on my build up anger and how to not let it out on others because I know I can overcome the youth violence I went through.



ESSAY 5

DYLAN CROSTON

STEAMM Middle School



Do you know the cause of youth violence? If you don't know what youth violence is, it's kids committing acts of violence. So in my opinion I think the main cause of youth violence is people. I think that because of what people do to other people, like bullying and peer pressure and more.

First, I think bullying is a big cause of youth violence. Because people getting bullied can become depressed, it makes them angry and want to hurt themselves and others, all because 1-2 people found something different from them and make fun of them because of it. Also when people bully someone and they want to hurt people because they like something someone else doesn't, so they could put lives in danger by bullying someone. That is why I think bullying is a big cause of youth violence.

Second, I think peer pressure is another cause of youth violence. I think that because people telling someone to do

something and that person being told to do feels like they have no choice because he wants to be more popular. Also it can lead into fighting and drinking alcohol which can lead to getting arrested and more. That is my opinion on why peer pressure can lead to youth violence.

Third, I think depression can cause youth violence because they could become depressed enough to hurt people. Some people get depressed from bullying or the death of someone close. This can cause depression and people that are depressed want to hurt themselves or want to hurt other people. Which can cause school shooting and can cause kids to cause acts of violence.

One answer to what causes youth violence, is bullying. So in my opinion the main cause of youth violence is people. I think this because people can cause bullying, depression and more. That is what I think causes youth violence



ESSAY 6

DERRICK GORDON

STEAMM Middle School

Do you want to know about youth violence? Well I'm about to tell you what it is, youth violence is where kids in the community are getting hurt, killed, and even from their families and much more. Young people are greatly affected by youth violence because of fights, bullying, and much more.

Violence has affected my life by fighting shootings and stealing. I've been in a school shooting and we had to be on lockdown for a long time. The reason why I put that is because I was in a school and it was dangerous and we had to be on lock down for a long time. Another thing why youth violence is bad is because I've seen people fight because of gossip or bullying. The reason why I put that evidence is because when somebody says something or does something then that will fire back at you.

Causes of youth violence are peer pressure and domestic violence. Kids are more likely to engage in risky times if somebody comes into their house. The reason why I put that evidence is because maybe a kid wants to kill himself, or somebody comes into their house and kills them. Kids

who live in a dangerous home will be in danger. The reason why I put that evidence is because if people robbed their house or kidnapped, that is not a good house for them to live in.

The thing I could do about youth violence is helping people get better with their peers or friends. Kids can stop being friends with the person and in a bad situation they can walk away from it and move on. The reason why I put that evidence is because you don't have to fight everybody to get the point across you can just walk away and move on. If it's kids fighting then they don't think it's right they can all truths and can become friends again. The reason why I put that is because you don't always have to keep fighting with them, it's just going to make it a big problem.

That's why youth violence is where kids in the community are getting hurt, killed and even from their families and much more. Young people are greatly affected by youth violence because of fights, bullying, and much more.



ESSAY 7

KALEB GRESKY

Crenshaw Middle School



I have never experienced violence personally in my life. But in cases of violence in general it can lead to death, bad mental health, and social rejection. Nevertheless, you and I can prevent young violence by being kind to others, reporting violence to authorities, and not ignoring the warning signs. But if we work together we can stop all of the violence over a long period of time.

Personally, I have never experienced violence, but I know some of my friends have in their life. Additionally when they experienced this violence I'm always nice to them, and helped them cope with their loss. As an example, one of my friend's dad was stabbed, and he passed away, and every few days I would call him and check up on him and help him cope with his dad's death.

Violence can cause many bad things to happen. One of the things can be death since some of the violence can get so serious that someone may take physical action. The second thing is bad mental health because someone might have had a bad experience with violence before, and they might have gotten hurt close to them and they don't want that to happen again. A third thing that might happen because of violence, and is social rejection since people might think if they hang around the person they might get hurt too.

Even if violence around the world can lead to bad things, you and I can put a stop to it. One way to stop violence

is to be kind to others. The reason why being kind might help is some people just need that little bit of kindness just to rethink doing something bad. Another way to stop violence reporting it. Since if you report it to the authorities, the actual people creating violence will have to stop so they won't get in trouble. One of the last reasons that I can think that can stop violence is not ignoring warning signs. The reason why it will help is if we don't ignore the sign we will be able to find out what's happening and we can prevent it from happening again.

Nevertheless, all of that is not able to stop us from trying To prevent violence at any cost. One of the ways all of us could stop violence is by reaching out to the people who are in danger. As well as rehabilitating them if they have been exposed to enough of violence. Something else is always being done by them so they'll be affected by violence less than usual.

In conclusion, being kind to other people, not ignoring warning signs, and reporting violence are all ways that we can stop violence, even if I have never experience violence? Even if violence we are trying to prevent won't stop, it can lead to death, social rejection, and bad mental health. So we have to try to work together and help each other to prevent violence before it happens. So I hope after you read this essay you will consider preventing violence on the daily.



ESSAY 8

JABRI HARRIS

Early College Middle School

Youth violence is a common problem with young people and their schools. There are many types of youth violence. Youth violence and violence in general has had a big part in my life considering my dad died when I was 5, and we were in poverty. I was not treated the best along with my 7 other siblings. At a very young age, I was injured badly twice by my mom. My mom and dad physically fought a lot and we tried to stop them but got hurt in the process. Going from house to house moving from state to state, I enjoyed it for what it was worth but then I found out Why we were doing that. My lovely dad was chasing my mom to get us back from a custody battle he won, but my mom kept stealing us back and him being him, he kept getting us back. So in my life I have definitely experienced youth violence.

Also, besides my family drama I have lived in places where there was a lot of shooting and I still live there. There is a shooting or someone died every week in my neighborhood which causes a lot of trauma because they died right in front of you or around you, it hurts and makes you cry. And the after affects and trauma last forever and it's like you're stuck in a nightmare, especially at night when no one is around. I have seen many dead bodies in my life and one of them was my dad. That sight will never leave my mind and I will never forget that sight. Crying and sleeping seems like the only answer. And every time someone tries to help they just make it

worse or make it sound like it was your fault. I still cry a lot about it and it's been almost 9 years, and it's ok to cry.

I feel like there are many causes of youth violence. It could be because past trauma, being bullied, empowerment, peer or parent pressure, mental illness, drugs and alcohol use, child abuse, media influence, low self-esteem, unpopular, sexuality, religion, or just thinking your better than everyone else. Homicide is the third leading cause of death for young people ages 10-24. Each day, approximately 12 young people are victims of homicide.

What can I do to help prevent youth violence from happening all over the globe? There are many things we can do like be nice, don't be agitators, call an adult or the police if you see anything weird or suspicious. Also listen to what you are told by parents or teachers, take advice, if you know it's wrong don't do it, don't use drugs or alcohol, make rules, regulations and restrictions that create a safe and supportive environment, and don't use guns/firearms or any harmful weapon.

In conclusion there are many things we can do to prevent youth violence like be kind, share, don't get or use weapons, call 911 if you see something weird or not normal, and pay attention. This is my view on, youth violence.



ESSAY 9

MARIAH INGRAM

STEAMM Middle School

Youth violence is a big deal and can affect kids and teens with a huge effect. There are different types of Youth violence like ... Traumatic events, mental illness, peer pressure, drug and alcohol use, insufficient parental supervision. Etc. It can affect kids and teens like not attending school, depression, self-harm, murder, suicide. Etc.

What can I do to help the situation? Well, to start you need to compare how they are acting now to how they act when they are happy and mentally and physically stable. You can try to tell a trusted adult or teacher. Try to comfort the person and try to feel how they feel and what they are going through. There is only so much you can do tho so try not to do too much because it can stress the person out even more than they already are. Even you can go thru what they are going through at the moment.

So how has youth violence affected you and your life? Well for me youth violence has affected my life when other kids or teens fight because some kids/teens fight to be noticed or seen by more popular kids/teens and some do it for fun or entertainment. While they are fighting or planning to fight they don't understand how it can affect other people around them because some kids/teens get traumatized while seeing a fight and it could traumatize their childhood. Just because they watched a fight happen in front of them. That happened to me at some of my other schools so I think kids/teens need to be careful of what they do in school, outside of school. Etc. I think that if kids/teens were more careful with their actions and what they say, then there will probably be less youth violence in the world.

So how has youth violence affected your life and what can you do to help?



ESSAY 10

CLARA MCCLOSKEY

Early College Middle School

I think words are the most powerful and impactful thing in the universe. We often tend to not use words justly, instead we use them as if they have no effect on other people and their lives. I am one of the many victims of words, hurtful and violent words to be precise. Now, not many people consider words to be as violent as physical violence, but myself and the 160,000 teens in the United States that have skipped school because they were being bullied are proof that words, especially negative ones, shape our beliefs, change how we behave, how we dress, how we see ourselves and others, who we associate ourselves with, who we see when we look in a mirror and if we decide the person who is reflecting back is someone we like or not. Everything from how we live, to why we live, to who we live for, and to how much we want to live all come down to words. To many, words are just spoken thoughts, but to my story and many others who have a story words can do extraordinary damage.

I was scared to go to school after what had happened to me. I was dealt a bad hand in the game of life. I had been diagnosed with a rare medical condition at the ripe age of seven years old and I was certainly no genius in the first grade, but it doesn't take a rocket scientist to know you were being bullied by not only students, but teachers as well for something you couldn't help. The signs mounted upon school hallway walls mean nothing in today's world. No bullying zone, be a buddy not a bully, or don't be a bully are meek attempts at schools trying to stop bullying. If we all could stop bullying I think we would have by now, but unfortunately we cannot. If humanity really cared about those who have been beat down by words then they would listen to our cries for help. My cries for help when I stopped eating because people would call me fat, my cries for help when a seven year old version of me stood before her own mother saying she wanted to not be here anymore because it hurt too much, my cries for help when I straightened my natural hair everyday for school because some girl in my class thought it was ugly. That week we had to cut all of my hair off from the heat damage, but it's all ok because there's no bully zone signs littering the walls right?

It seems almost unheard of for a seven year old little girl to want to commit suicide, but unfortunately those are the

effects of bullying. My illness introduced new problems into my life like severe anxiety, obsessive compulsions, separation anxiety, memory loss, decline in math skills, and tics. Tics, specifically, were the most horrid part of it all. Mostly because my tics were physical and sometimes even verbal for everyone to see and hear. Kids would stare and address me as the freak, teachers would be anything, but understanding about my situation. In today's world, the teacher is always right and the student is always wrong. When a student would bully me for whatever they decided was wrong with me that day, at first, I would bring it to a teacher's attention. Sometimes, teachers would even catch them in the act, but would they do anything? No. Did they tell me I was exaggerating? Yes. After a while I just stopped advocating for myself and my well being because what's the point if my cries for help would just be muffled?

It wasn't until the fifth grade my parents decided to move me from my old school to Canton City Schools. Here, I have learned the true meaning of youth violence and the numerous reasons why it occurs. Specific types of bullying may include cyber bullying, verbal bullying, physical bullying, social bullying, and more. The most common type of bullying is verbal harassment. Verbal harassment is reported to affect 79% of middle school students, social harassment reported at 50% of middle schoolers, physical harassment at 29%, and cyber bullying is reported to affect 25% of middle school students. Bullying most commonly begins the first year of middle school, as it did for me. Bullying is often defined as a situation where one person is being harassed or attacked by the same individual repeatedly. This is true in some situations, but bullying is far too significant of an issue to put a label on what it is and what its not. Tell the 2.7 million of the youth victims that what they went through wasn't bullying if it doesn't meet certain criteria.

On a final note, words can be excruciatingly painful. They follow you for life. If you're like me and the 16% of students in the grades ninth to twelfth, the 22% of students ages 12-18, and the 282,000 secondary school students who have been bullied and physically harassed then you'd truly know the effects of cruel words. Please keep in mind, these are only reported cases of bullying in the United States. If the number of reports are this significantly high, then



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imagine how the numbers would sky rocket if today's youth would speak up. Unfortunately, it is not that easy as adults make it seem to speak up. It took me five years until I could speak up about the bullying I was enduring and even when I finally did my worst fear about speaking up had come true. I was silenced and suppressed by the adult opinion. I believe if we, as a community, as a society, as humanity want to help contribute to resolving youth violence regarding bullying we must bring in opinions and voices of the victims. Holding assemblies where adults preach to today's youth about bullying is very ineffective.

It is one thing for an important message about bullying to come from an adult, but its a whole other situation when it comes from the heart that bullying has tainted. For the teens and the children reading this, I hope you have never had to go through anything myself and the majority of today's adolescence has gone through. For those who have been unfortunately effected by bullying, please don't give up. Words are powerful and you have the power to use them to move hearts, and hearts move limbs. If you keep going, so will the future.



ESSAY 11

PROMISE JACKSON

Crenshaw Middle School

How has violence affected my life? Violence has affected me my whole life violence affects me almost any and everywhere I go, I've been confronted by violence in many ways and many places I've been confronted by violence at home, at school my family's homes, even at parks is anywhere safe. Because every turn I take there's violence and more violence there has been violence in my home when my mom's ex husband would abuse her and she'd fight back so me and my sibling would have to hear it or even see it, there has been violence in my families homes, where I've had to see my dead family members, bodies dead because of gang violence or abuse, or even the times I had to see a man and a dog got hit by a car because of drunk driving or maybe even the time I had to see my cousins dead body in my aunt's home because he was babysitting his SIBLINGS And gang members broke in and shot him 12 TIMES we can't even babysit our own siblings anymore without ending up dead or hurt what is this world that we live in will the violence ever end?

What are some causes of youth violence in my community? Some of there causes of youth violence in my community are gangs, guns, parents not locking their guns or weapons up properly, mental health of kids, bullying, witnessing violence, harsh discipline at home, or maybe just people following what they see others do so being a follower. I have seen many very talented and smart teenagers give up almost everything to follow along with what they see their friends doing like joining gangs and playing with guns because they have seen others such as there friends doing the same. I think that there are many causes if youth violence in my community, and I think that all of it or maybe just most

of it can be stopped or at least helped if we really try and I want to try to help because I don't want to keep seeing all of these dead family members or dead children and animals, and even friends I think there are many, many causes of youth violence in my community, I just wish it would stop even if I'm the one who has to try and stop it or help it because ill do anything to not have to wake up everyday and find out someone else I love died or got shot or hurt just from being outside or maybe just being in their own home I just want it to end.

What can I as and individual do to reduce youth violence in my community? I think me as an individual can reduce youth violence in my community by just being kind to people to everyone no matter what their differences are or what they have and what they don't have or just by not leaving anyone out. I think I can reduce youth violence by doing what's right and being honest so, for instance, if I were to know anyone who has a gun or is a threat to me or anyone or is planning to do something that can harm anyone Id tell a trusted adult like one of my teachers or my parents or even my grandparents, and I know some people are scared to be called a snitch or they're scared of losing friends or anything in the sort, but if you're scared you'll lose friends or anything for doing what's right they are obviously not the rights friends for you because that was me I was scared, but doing what was right saved and helped a lot of people so if you're scared, to tell a trusted adult because you're scared of getting made fun of or losing friends trust me it will be okay, but if you don't want to do that there is the mobile crisis center, and say something they are anonymous so you can always use one of the two to help.



ESSAY 12

ANDREW PARKER

Early College Middle School

Violence hurts all
People feel it everywhere
I am affected

Infested by drugs
Junkies roaming in the streets
I can't walk my dog

I'm not affected
That's something you couldn't say
It's seen every day

Just trying to walk
Bad neighborhood all around
How did I get here

A red car pulls up
The window starts rolling down
Out peeks a lady

Envelope in hand
Asking me to deliver
Offering to pay

I just answer no
Not knowing what else to say
I grab my sister

We walk fast away
Walking turns into running
Trying to get home

I just laughed it off
But something could have happened
I'm still just a kid

Why should I be scared
Fearful of the outside world
Shook by the newspaper

Violence is a symptom
It starts with a victim
Set in my community
No one can build an immunity

Too many drugs to count
No one can find the amount
Overdoses in McKinley
The future is looking grimly

Fentanyl is taking control
It affects us as a whole
Kids buying bootleg pills
To stop their anxiety that fills

So many ways for violence to start
Ripping relationships and families apart
Alcohol is so easy to find
Once kids get started it affects their minds

"I'll only get drunk once right?"
You say that until you get uptight
Drugs make you feel like you can fly
Until you take too much, then you die

People are tired of living in poverty
Looking at everyone else's novelties
What more do you expect from Canton
The people are not scared to abandon

Violence is a disease
And kindness is the cure
This is something I believe
Hearts are changed from tainted to pure

All people need is a friend
To not feel lonely
Wounds start to mend
Over time they do so slowly

A person is a fragile thing
And when you find them broken
You take take them under your wing
Now kindness in them has awoken

Find those most in need of compassion
And don't be afraid to take action



ESSAY 13

HALEY PRICE

Crenshaw Middle School

Violence has affected my life by child abuse from my birth mother. Violence can affect all of us in different ways, and I was affected by abuse. This is my story of how violence has affected my life. When I was about 4 my younger brother Hunter 2 and my older brother Christian 6, were cleaning while mother was eating her big steak with mushrooms and spiked orange juice with vodka. I was cleaning the kitchen, Christian was cleaning the living room and the playroom, and Hunter was sleeping in his room. Mother only gave us 1 and ½ hours to clean until she punished us. My brothers and I were so hungry except for Jaxson. He wasn't born mother was still pregnant with him. She would come out into the kitchen here and there to check if anyone has been sneaking food from the cupboards, fridge, and trash bag. The only things we ate was stale food. We would get lucky when visiting our aunt Sam's house and our great great grandma's house Ramona. Mother saw I wasn't cleaning not knowing how to use a broom and started yelling and smacking me. Christian heard my cries and came to investigate. The last thing I saw before she took one more blow knocking me out was my older brother's horrified face of seeing his only younger sister covered in bruises and blood. That's all I remembered before I was knocked out by our raging of a beast called our mother. In conclusion, I was affected by violence from being abused by my birth mother.

One of the causes of youth violence is child abuse. Over a long term, children who are abused or neglected are at increased risk for experiencing future violence victimization, perpetration, substance abuse, sexually transmitted infections, delayed brain development,

lower education attainment, and limited employment opportunities. For example a quote from the article/text, "A study of a national sample of American children found that over the past year 60% were exposed to violence, crime, or abuse in their home, schools, and in the community." In conclusion, what we have discovered is that one of the causes of youth violence is that child abuse can damage all types of things but more importantly, involve a child in Youth Violence.

One day you may think what can I do to help prevent youth violence? Well don't stress there are many ways to prevent youth violence, Whether it's showing that you care and being there for them or helping to create a safe environment for the children. So again what I'll be talking about more specifically would be helping someone, showing you care and being there for them. When a child/teen does youth violence as drastic as shooting up a school or as dire as bullying another kid, someone always has a reason weather is be abuse at home, bullying at school. (etc) Feeling alone in a situation like having to battle the pressure of loneliness and other negative emotions being alone is the last thing they need. We can protect youth and support their growth into healthy adults. Certain factors may increase or decrease the risk of youth experiencing or perpetrating violence to prevent violence, we must understand and address the factors that put people at risk or protect them from violence. In conclusion, the way we can prevent youth violence is to support them. Show you care about their emotions and maybe they choose not to do something they'll later regret. If we have support groups for them, maybe they won't feel so alone.



ESSAY 14

ALEX SHOCKLING

STEAMM Middle School

Have you ever been a victim of youth violence? Youth violence is a big problem in our community, but there are a lot of people who don't pay attention to people being affected by youth violence, and it can get worse if it's not recognized. I believe that youth violence is a big problem in our community because it causes kids to act differently and more aggressive and in this essay I will explain how youth violence has affected my life, what I believe are causes of youth violence, and what I could do to reduce youth violence in my community.

I believe that youth violence is a big problem in our community because of the ways it has affected me. I know it has affected me because in school we have to practice doing lock down drills. Lock down drills used to not even be thought about until kids were affected by youth violence. We also have to wear clear or mesh book bags so the adults can see if we have any weapons or something we shouldn't. Just a few years ago we could wear whatever kind of book bag we want without getting in trouble. Youth violence has affected many people's lives, and people need to know some of the causes of youth violence so it can be prevented or reduced.

I believe that youth violence is a big problem in our community, and I think I know some of the causes of youth violence. I think some of the causes of youth violence are communities and neighborhoods, traumatic events, and peer pressure. Due to research, I think these are causes of youth violence because were teens live can affect the way they act and they can become more aggressive, traumatic events can also affect the way a teen acts and can cause youth violence, and a teen being peer pressured to do something can cause youth violence

because it can cause them to do something bad, and/or they can even risk their own lives if they let someone peer pressure them. This is why I think these are causes of youth violence. How could I reduce youth violence in my community.

I believe that youth violence is a big problem in our community, and I think I know how I could fix or help reduce youth violence. To reduce youth violence from the examples I have shown, communities and neighborhoods can cause youth violence, do to where someone lives and a way to prevent it is watching out for people getting bullied or made fun of and sick up for them or tell an adult. Traumatic events are also a source of youth violence and a way to prevent it is being safe while you drive or while you cook, and looking out for children and make sure they are being safe. Peer pressure is one of the biggest causes of youth violence because of how many people fall into peer pressure, so way you can prevent it is watching out for kids getting told to do something that they don't want to do or watch out for how your kids hang out with and make sure they don't feel like they can talk to you or anybody else. These are ways I could prevent youth violence in young kids.

I believe that youth violence is a big problem in our community because it causes kids to act differently and more aggressive. Kids being affected by youth violence can cause dramatic changes in the way someone acts and what they do. There are many causes for youth violence, and they should be watched out for. Whenever you go out try and look at your surroundings and see if you notice someone being affected by youth violence and try and talk to them and help reduce youth violence.



ESSAY 15

MAXIMUS TURNER

Crenshaw Middle School

Violence has affected my life by changing my perspective. An example would be when I was younger my stepbrother Jacob was into violent gang related activities. When I was around 6 or 7 Jacob brought a BB handgun and shot my sister's wall, the one around where she was. After a bit of time he asked me to fire it off around her. Me being the best kid in the world I refused. The rest of the story is a little bit personal, but I can 100% guarantee my sister didn't get shot by it though. When this happened I resided in Cedar Crest down in Newark, Ohio. It was a bright morning. But some good news to go with the story, is my dad confiscated the gun. He never was able to use it again Jacob that is.

One of the most major factors to this type of violence is an unstable family life. Jacob not having his father in his life but getting a stepdad must have hurt him, so he resorted to trying to find a family through gangs. But for others who don't have stepdads they resort to gang leaders, members, or even flat out anarchists. This gives them a false sense of security of protection or a role model. This can lead to the kid being just as messed up as the anarchist or gang leader, or even worse and lead up to death! This isn't just for sons it can affect daughters or even anyone at a ripe young age. According to Prevention Strategies the best way to prevent this is to "provide a stable home" or "provide a quality education at a young age." But the second one is kind of useful but not fully because any public place can suffer from bullies or other

corny things. This can lead to the same result such as Sandy Hooks Promise informational video, one of the lead signs to him/shooter shooting his school up is him being bullied by some dudes who were clearly much stronger than him showing that no school is safe from some guy who thinks he's the stuff.

What can I do to prevent youth violence? If that's what you're wondering I can sort of help you with that. One thing you can do is make sure to constantly speak with your child about their feelings and make sure they are in a healthy place or even give them a counselor. Make sure you don't neglect spending time with them when you are presented the opportunity. Now for the young ones that dont have kids here's what you can do, make sure you are open with friends and other people you can speak with to prevent them from even thinking of harming one another. If you see someone being lonely, you probably think "ew gross I think he/she/they just looked at me" instead even if you don't like them speak with them just that one time or even more. That's the most you can do the bullying situation you could just tell an adult

But that might make the bully think the kid ratted and now they're getting it worse!

You can't really do anymore than this so just hope that you have some good connections and that what you try works.



ESSAY 16

CARLO VIROLA

Early College Middle School

“As parents one of the biggest jobs we have is teaching our children how to resolve problems effectively. We live in an era where everyone is quick to act the fool over simple issues. As we used to say when I was on the streets, ‘everybody wants to cut a movie.’” This quote is by Drexel Deal, he is a motivational speaker and author. This quote shows how youth violence is very much a part of our world. It affects many aspects of life and can also leave parents worried about their children leaving the house to hang out with friends, worried when their kids go to school, they won’t come home, or worried their kids are getting bullied and might consider committing suicide. I am still questioning youth violence; why is there youth violence, how am I affected by it, and what can I do to try and prevent it in the places around me?

Youth Violence is in our world and we can’t deny it. But what is the real cause of it? Community Violence is. When a group of young people perform an act of Violence in a public space in the community that is an act of Community Violence. Your Community has a huge impact on Youth Violence and here is why. If you live in a violent community all your life, it can do bad things for you. According to the CDC Violence in a community can cause injury, mental health conditions and PTSD. This can especially harm our youth growing up in a situation like that.

Youth Violence affects everyone in many different ways, it even has affected me too. My cousin was at the gas station while trying to help his sister move out of her house. He was arguing with another young male outside. The other male escalated the situation and went to his car and grabbed a gun. He and his other friend shot my cousin in his head. He was in critical condition and died. Since the other male was just in an argument and wanted to escalate the situation he took my cousin’s life. These types of situations happen every day and it doesn’t just

kill people, it can seriously hurt people and ruin their lives and even their family members’ lives too.

Now that I have acknowledged the cause and effect of youth violence. What can I do to help out? I can help out around my communities and school. I can speak out and tell adults who have impacted the community these problems and tell them they need to do more about it. According to the CDC, if we want to prevent more youth violence in our schools, we should teach teens to understand and control their reactions to social situations and their emotions. Schools should also build a trusted bond between staff and students so they feel safe and if they have trouble they have someone to talk to. Since in Early College Middle School, I am the Vice President I can provide these ideas to the school Counselor and Principal so we can have more support for students.

A wise woman named Betty Williams who was a peace activist once said, “There’s no use talking about the problem unless you talk about the solution.” If we really want to cut down the amount of youth violence in our world, (especially in America) we can’t just talk about it, we have to come up with a way to try and prevent youth violence and implement it. I hate hearing stories on the news about “school in California gets shot up by a student” or “Gang activity in the neighborhood causes multiple deaths”. The really terrible thing is my parents are worried about me going to some places in my own neighborhood. I hope that someday I will be able to go outside and really get to appreciate my hometown Canton, Ohio for what it is.

These are the two websites I used and got my information from.

<https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/youthviolence/prevention.html>

<https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/communityviolence/index.html>



ESSAY 17 | AMBASSADOR

ZEBREE VIROLA

STEAMM Middle School

“Violence is the last refuge of the incompetent,”

— Isaac Asimov.

In modern society violence is a natural thing and is the most common solution to every problem. Just because its the most common solution doesn't mean its the right one. Violence can cause very things to happen like death or serious life long injuries. As a society we need to reduce youth violence that includes gun violence. Meaning we educate people on how to resolve conflict in other ways. I will tell you about how violence had affected me, causes of youth violence, ways to reduce as an individual.

Violence has affected my life in a devastating way. My cousin was killed by gun violence. He got into an argument with someone at a store. Instead of just arguing they got a gun and shot and killed him. It was very traumatic for our family. Fortunately we got some closure, the shooter was convicted of the crime. Even if someone does things to upset you, violence is not the answer to your problem. Violence greatly affected my life and my families horrifically.

Youth violence is sometimes caused by the environment. The people you associate with can also lead to youth violence. If the people around someone are bad or do bad things they are more likely to do bad things or be bad themselves. When someone is in a bad environment they think that is okay and that influences their behavior

or what they decide to do. When you grow up around violence that's all you know how to do. As you become an adult with kids of your own and do as your parents/guardians did. The cycle will only repeat because violence causes more violence, directly or indirectly.

Educating the youth about violence is a way to reduce youth violence. I would start by making a program at my local urban league. The program would give youth alternative conflict solutions. It would share stories of people who went through violence. The victims would explain why violence is not the way. I would also have speaker who were incarcerated and explain how it ruined their life. Seeing people talk about their experiences that violence causes or produce they might try to stop violence from affecting their own lives. A program like this would help the youth see that violence only answer or way.

Violence is something that occurs on a daily basis for most people. Violence is the of many problems we have today but there are other solutions to problems. Violence affected my life when my cousin was killed. The environment or people someone hangs around could cause them to do violent things. A program teaching the youth about violence could reduce youth violence. Many think violence is the answer but its not it just causes more problems and the cycle repeats. We need to stop violence in our youth, let them know its not the answer their looking for.



ESSAY 18

ZA'RAYE WATSON

STEAMM Middle School

Have you ever been affected by youth violence? Youth violence is an ongoing problem in today's age and there has been more than 500 school shootings in the past 15-20 years. The worst part about it all is, most of the deaths could've been prevented. I believe that youth violence is a big problem, and in this essay I will be explaining how violence has affected my life, what I believe are causes of youth violence in the community, and what I can do to reduce youth violence in my community.

Violence has affected my life in many ways. For instance, My family members have come very close to death due to violence in my community. Not only that but I've witnessed plenty of people lose their tempers and resort to violence as their solution. I've personally known people who have committed certain acts of violence and as a primary source, all the testimonies I've heard could've been prevented to certain extents. In my opinion, I think that most youth deaths are from a person's pride or dignity.

However, the causes of youth violence will vary. Most people believe that it is gang related or it is because they got themselves into some trouble. But the causes can shock you such as Media Influence. Social Media influence can cause lots and lots of trouble for example, music and platforms like Instagram, Twitter, and etc. Most of music today talks about violence which influences kids growing up to do the things that they are

saying in Music. Also, most causes come from lack of stability and structure in their homes growing up. That also influences them to act out so they can feel seen or make them feel less of in the shadows. That's exactly why people do things such as campaigns to reduce the level of stress and violence for the kids growing up.

There can be many ways to reduce the level of violence in a community. I personally feel as if it would help reduce it if there were campaigns for people to come out to and talk to if they ever feel as if they would want to hurt someone. Talking about the problem is an easy way for people to calm down from the anger that they are feeling. Another way I think could help reduce it is contact someone on social media that has a high amount of following on social medias. They can help repost a "Stop youth violence!" Picture or even make a post themselves and help start a campaign with them. That is what I would do to help reduce youth violence in the community.

In conclusion, I believe that Youth violence is a serious ongoing problem that is caused by many things and there are plenty of solutions for the issue. Not only are there many things that you can do to reduce it but there are many things that we don't know that can cause violence. In the essay it explains many of them and it also explains how it affected my life personally. To wrap up the essay, Do you think that violence is a serious issue that needs to be stopped?



Students from Crenshaw Middle School



Students from STEAMM Middle School



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